

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): An apparatus for forming an image, in which hardware resources for use in the forming of the image are provided, and a program runs in respect of the forming of the image, said apparatus comprising:

an image data converting unit configured to convert ~~which converts~~ a format of image data from a first format to a second format, said first format and said second format each being one of a multi-value format, a four-value format, a binary format, an eight-value format, and an MH/MR/MMR format; and

a format unifying unit configured to unify ~~which unifies~~ a plurality of formats of image data by utilizing said image data converting unit.

Claim 2 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said image data converting unit converts formats of image data used by a copier, a printer, a scanner, and a facsimile.

Claim 3 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said image data converting unit converts a format of image data by resizing an image of the image data, compressing the image data, decoding the image data, and attending to multi-value conversion of the image data.

Claim 4 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said image data converting unit converts the format of image data by hardware.

Claim 5 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said format unifying unit unifies the plurality of formats of image data into one of the plurality of formats.

Claim 6 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said format unifying unit includes a conversion executing unit which converts the image data by utilizing said image data converting unit according to a unified format.

Claim 7 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 6, wherein said format unifying unit includes a plurality of conversion executing units, one of which is said conversion executing unit, and others of which are identical to said conversion executing unit.

Claim 8 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein said format unifying unit assigns the plurality of conversion executing units to respective images, thereby converting image data of the images.

Claim 9 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 8, wherein any given one of said conversion executing units converts image data of a corresponding one of the images by utilizing said image data converting unit if a format of the image data of the corresponding one of the images is different from the unified format.

Claim 10 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a consolidated printing unit which consolidates and prints images whose formats are unified by said format unifying unit.

Claim 11 (Original): The apparatus as claimed in claim 10, wherein said format unifying unit notifies said consolidated printed unit that image data is ready for consolidated printing if said format unifying unit completes unification of the formats of image data after conversion of at least one of the formats or because of no need for conversion of at least one of the formats.

Claim 12 (Currently Amended): A method for consolidated printing by an image forming apparatus, in which hardware resources for use in forming of an image are provided, and a program runs in respect of the forming of the image, said method comprising the steps of:

unifying a plurality of formats of image data to a single format by converting the formats of image data by hardware, said single format being one of a multi-value format, a four-value format, a binary format, an eight-value format, and an MH/MR/MMR format; and consolidating and printing image data whose formats are unified.